GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:278
ANSWERED ON:27.02.2008
TH SAARC MINISTERS CONFERENCE
Sai Shri Nand Kumar;Tripathy Shri Braja Kishore

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the 29th SAARC Ministers Conference was held in the recent past as reported in 'The Hindu' dated December 12, 2007; and

(b) if so, the details of various issues discussed and finalized during the said Conference?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS(SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE)

(a) to (b) The 29th Session of the Council of Ministers was held on December 7-8, 2007. The Meeting was preceded by the 34th Standing Committee (December 5-6, 2007) and 31st Programming Committee (December 3-4, 2007).

2. The meeting took stock of the progress on the decisions taken at the 14th SAARC Summit and took further decisions to move SAARC from a declaratory phase to the implementation phase. The various issues that were discussed and finalised during the Meeting are as follows:

The Council expressed satisfaction on the finalisation of Agreement on the establishment of SAARC Development Fund (SDF) and decided that a temporary Cell would be set up at the SAARC Secretariat to implement identified projects from available funds. The Council decided that the SDF should start funding projects before the next Session of the Council.
The Ministers adopted the SAARC Declaration on Climate Change which reflected the concerns of the SAARC Member States on the adverse impact of climate change. This Declaration was conveyed to the UN Conference on Climate Change in Bali.
The Council recommended the grant of observer status to Mauritius. Australia's request for observer status was also discussed. The Committee also directed the SAARC Secretariat to prepare a note covering: (a) modalities and parameters for cooperation with Observers and with other donors; (b) criteria for granting Observer status; and (c) criteria for participation of Observers in SAARC activities. This issue will be discussed in detail during the next Council Meeting.
It was decided to appoint Dr. Sheel Kant Sharma of India as the next Secretary General of SAARC on completion of the term of the present Secretary General, Mr. Chenkyab Dorji on 29 February 2008.
The Ministers endorsed recommendations to ensure rationalisation and prioritisation of SAARC activities and mechanism. The Council also endorsed the recommendations of the three Ministerial meetings i.e. Transport, Finance and Home, held since the 14th SAARC Summit.
The Council directed the immigration authorities to re-examine the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES), with visa exemptions for high dignitaries and visa liberalisation to cover others such as businessmen, journalists and sportsmen.
The Council considered the Secretary General's comprehensive review of the working of SAARC Regional Centres. They decided that Secretariat would prepare a note based on inputs from the SAARC Member States that will be examined by next Session of the Programming Committee for undertaking a comprehensive review of the Centres.
The Council welcomed the offer of Sri Lanka to host the Fifteenth SAARC Summit in 2008 coinciding with the Diamond Jubilee of their Independence. It further decided that Maldives would host the Sixteenth SAARC Summit in 2009.
In view of the threat posed by terrorism to peace and security in the region, the Council underscored the need to further strengthen the efforts of the Member States to suppress terrorism in all its forms. In this context, the Council recommended the early finalisation of the Draft Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.
The Council stressed the need to have mutual consultations among the concerned Member States relating to the several road, rail and sea corridors projects identified from the recommendations of the SAARC Regional Multi-modal Transport Study (SRMTS) and to take action to develop Regional Motor Vehicle Agreement as decided by SAARC Ministers of Transport.